



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

The Employee Assistance Program to help you manage your most valuable resource— Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 281-6315 Spokane (509) 482-3686

Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. I know my employee personally. If I attempt to refer him to the EAP and avoid discussing his personal troubles, he will think I don't care about him. How can I avoid this discussion when making a supervisor referral?

A. The best way to show you care is to stay focused on job performance, be supportive of your employee, and demonstrate confidence in his ability to improve his performance. If your employee initiates a discussion about his personal problems, be genuine in your concern, but respond with your belief that a discussion will distract you and him from a more important goal of accepting a referral to EAS, your EAP (Employee Assistance Program). It is natural for supervisors to care about their employees. Employees typically want and appreciate the sympathy of supervisors. This makes a discussion with your employee difficult to avoid. However, this sympathy can interfere with your resolve to use a supervisor referral, particularly if the employee seems knowledgeable about his problem and its cause, and appears sure about what he thinks his next step should be.

■ Q. Once an employee accepts a supervisor referral to the EAP, my fear is that he or she will suddenly reject it if asked to sign a release so the EAP can verify attendance. How should this issue be approached during the referral?

A. In practice, it is rare for an employee to accept an EAP referral only to reject it over the need for a release. A supervisor referral is not a casual event. It is a management decision to offer the employee help to avoid an adverse response to continuing performance problems. As a result, employees are typically anxious to have supervisors know they followed through with an EAP referral and participated in the program's recommendations. This can only be done with a signed release. An employee's desire to participate in the EAP, and have it verified, increases when the supervisor is clear about the possible consequences for continuing performance problems. It is diminished when the supervisor referral appears of no importance. Remind your employee that supervisors are not provided personal information with a release, only verification of attendance, the time of the meeting and if further appointments are scheduled, as outlined in the EAS Confidentiality Policy.

■ Q. If I make a supervisor referral of my employee to the EAP, and the employee refuses, should I still notify the EA professional?

A. If you make a supervisor referral to the EAP, and the employee refuses the offer of help, notify the EAP. This can help your employee if he or she contacts the EAP at a later date because the EAP can conduct a more effective interview, knowing the nature of the performance problems experienced by the employee. The EAP can also give the employee an opportunity to sign a release so you can be notified of his or her participation. It is not unusual for an employee to visit the EAP as a "self-referral" days, weeks, or months after a supervisor referral was attempted. An EAP, knowing that the employee was originally a supervisor referral, may approach the employee interview differently to better understand the nature of workplace issues and personal problems. Whenever possible, consult with the EAP before making a supervisor referral, and let the EAP know if the employee declines this offer for help.

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■ Q. I promoted my employee because he is a superior performer-the best in the group. However, he began having problems completing assignments, and I am certain the work is beyond his ability. Can I assume that an EAP referral is not appropriate?

A. Your employee may be having difficulties because he does not have the skills or ability to perform effectively in his current position. However, this might not be the case. Making the assumption that only a skills issue exists rules out a personal problem. This is an example of diagnostic thinking by the supervisor. There could be a personal problem affecting his performance, although it may seem unlikely. Your employee deserves the benefits of resources and services the organization has to offer to improve performance. This includes the EAP. So, suggest the EAP or make a referral as you work toward resolution of his performance issues. Your employee may not accept EAP help, but at least you have taken the proper steps. Certainly your employee has been adversely affected by his recent performance shortcomings. This stress alone may exacerbate his performance problems and interfere with improvement. This makes use of the EAP a good idea.

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■ Q. My employee went to the EAP, and then to treatment after a positive drug test a couple of years ago. He is doing fine at work, but a couple of weeks ago I saw him near a street corner known for illegal drug activity. Should I tell the EAP?

A. Because your employee's performance at work is acceptable, you don't have a reason to suspect that he is using drugs, and there is no reason to report his whereabouts to the EAP. It is understandable that you are concerned about where you saw your employee, but his presence in an area known for drug activity does not necessarily mean that he is using drugs again. There are no restrictions on what you can confidentially tell your employee assistance professional, but remaining in your role as a supervisor-concerned with work-related matters-keeps you focused on what is best for the organization. You can call your EA Professional any time you have questions. Remember the EAP is there for you, too.

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**NOTES:**

Visit EAS on our website at:  
<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

